

# DCFS Weekly Update From the State Office

Tuesday, April 17, 2001

## The Performance Milestone Plan On DCFS Web Site

*By Carol Miller*

As follow-up to our "special edition" of the Weekly Update that was issued on April 9, 2001 regarding the Performance Milestone Plan (the Plan), we have had several requests for copies of the Plan. To reduce printing costs, the Plan is available on our web site at [www.hsdcs.state.ut.us/](http://www.hsdcs.state.ut.us/). Once there, you will see a table with listings of relevant information. Simply scroll down until you come to the fifth row in the table, and select "The Performance Milestone Plan May 1999" which appears in the second column. Left click once on this option and the Plan will load onto your screen. You must have Adobe Acrobat Reader downloaded to your computer, and if you have any questions or need assistance please call me at 801-538-4451 and I'll do my best to help you!

## DCFS Employee Receives Award

*By Linda Wininger*

Wonderful news! **Lisa Jorgensen** has been selected to receive an award at the Annual Awards Luncheon to be held on May 1, 2001. The Honorary Colonels, Rotary and Kiwanis clubs sponsor this event. Lisa is employed with the Northwest Team in Salt Lake City and is being recognized for her significant contribution to law enforcement in our community. Please help us in extending our congratulations and appreciation of Lisa's hard work and commitment to the families we serve.

## What Does DCFS Need?

*By Joelle Horel and LeRoy Franke*

DCFS needs Resource Families willing to serve as an integral part of a family service team to provide a sense of self that connects children to their past, present and future. Families can provide this care in any of four different categories.

- Does DCFS need Shelter Families? Yes! Families are needed who are willing to house children for short periods of time.
- Does DCFS need Foster Families? Yes! There are occasions when children need families whose primary responsibility is supporting reunification.
- Does DCFS need Foster-to-Adopt Families? Yes! This is our area of largest need. Foster-to-adopt families are willing to foster a child and work with the birth parents to promote reunification. If reunification is not successful, the family is willing to provide permanence for the child through adoption or guardianship.
- Does DCFS need Special Needs Adoptive Families? Yes! We need adoptive families for children who are legally free. Those children are siblings in need of placement together, children school age or teens, and those who have significant emotional, medical, physical, or behavioral needs. A family interested in adopting an infant with no special needs should be referred to the Adoption Exchange which maintains a listing other adoption agencies in Utah.

For more in-depth information, please refer to the attached article entitled "Who, What, When, Where, and Why--The Role of the Resource Family in the DCFS Team."

## Results Of Three-Question Poll

By Carol Miller

On March 26, 2001, a three-question poll was sent via e-mail to 1,251 DCFS staff and community partners. The questions asked were:

- Do you consistently read the Weekly Update?
- Do you consistently read the Weekly Update in its entirety, or do you read only those articles that apply to your specific job?
- If you DON'T read the Weekly Update, can you recommend another forum for getting important information to all DCFS staff?

Of those sent, 1,084 were opened. We received 423 replies, which results in a 39% response rate (**your responses are greatly appreciated!**). Based on the answers received, the results have been broken down into four categories: Do Not Read Update, Sometimes Read Update, Consistently Read Related Articles, and Consistently Read Entire Update. The following table shows the number and percentage of replies we received in each category.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Number of Replies</i>	<i>Percentage of Total Replies</i>
<b><i>Do Not Read Update</i></b>	28	6%
<b><i>Sometimes Read Update</i></b>	62	15%
<b><i>Consistently Read Related Articles</i></b>	146	35%
<b><i>Consistently Read Entire Update</i></b>	187	44%
<b><i>TOTAL</i></b>	<b>423</b>	<b>100%</b>

We received so many wonderful comments and suggestions and we would like to thank everyone for their valuable input! From these comments and suggestions, the following conclusions and recommendations have been presented to the Administrative Team and Region Directors for improving the Weekly Update to make it more reader-friendly and possibly increase our audience support:

- Keep the Updates to a maximum of four pages. Many readers expressed their preference for short articles that are to the point.
- Send the Update on a bi-weekly basis instead of weekly. The majority of respondents said they like getting the Update, but feel overwhelmed at the amount of work they already have.
- Highlight and congratulate select personnel for excellent work achievements. Workers who achieve high ratings in the Case Process Reviews and Qualitative Case Reviews could be a start.
- Ask supervisors to review the Weekly Update during staff meetings, or circulate the Weekly Update throughout each office with a routing slip for personnel to sign-off that they have read it. This is currently happening in some locations and seems to work well for employees.
- Where appropriate, identify articles by program area in the e-mail message where the articles are listed. Respondents stated this may help increase readership.
- Send information that is extremely pertinent to all staff (i.e., policy/procedure changes) in a separate e-mail from the Weekly Update. Some respondents expressed frustration at having to read through non-pertinent information to find the "important" stuff.

- Nearly all respondents stated how much they appreciate having this form of communication with the State Office. It would be beneficial to increase readership as most employees feel more in touch with administration when they read the Update.

## Positive Feedback About SAFE

*By Jack Green*

Yes, the title of this article is correct! Kim Pinnegar sent me an e-mail about some positive comments she has received regarding our SAFE system, and I wanted to share them with you. Kim wrote, "I just spoke with a new worker, who had previously been a caseworker in Arizona. She remarked on how user friendly SAFE was in comparison to the system she had worked on in Arizona. She said they had about 120 windows they had to access to work on their cases. She was impressed with SAFE. I also spoke with a worker in Ogden who has heard from two former workers, one went to Oregon and the other went to California. They both have told her they miss SAFE. Imagine? The worker in California said that the workers there still hand write their logs." Just a little food for thought.

## To Make Your Life Easier...Using SAFE Optimally

*By Robert Lewis*

### **Progress In Reducing Documented Exceptions**

Last October, we published statistics on the regions and offices that were using the documented exception tool appropriately and sparingly to complete their action items. We have rerun that data for the period January through March 2001 to see if more progress is occurring. Here are regions and offices with 95% or more of their action items completed without using the documented exception feature. The region and offices with asterisks are new to the list, indicating significant improvement over the past six months.

<b>Regions and offices above 95%</b>	<b>% action items completed without documented exception</b>
Western Region	97.5%
Eastern Region	97.4%
Southwest Region*	97.0%
Northern Region	96.5%
Blanding, Ute Family Services, Brigham*, Panguitch*, Delta, Nephi	100.0%
Castle Dale, Bountiful, Cedar City, Vernal	99.0%
Roosevelt*, Logan, Richfield, American Fork*	98.0%
Monticello, Magna, Tooele, St. George, Payson, Provo	97.0%
Layton, Jackson*, East Jordan*, Kanab*	96.0%
Price, Ogden, Kearns*	95.0%

*\*New in this report*

Using documented exceptions excessively to complete action items will cause more work and problems. It may also indicate the existence of procedural or compliance problems. Some offices with a high rate of documented exceptions are Glendale, Murray, Holladay, Beaver, and Clearfield. Can the SAFE team give some help?

**For general comments, suggestions, or questions about the weekly updates, e-mail Carol Miller or call 801-538-4451.**

**For questions about policy or rules,  
e-mail Steve Bradford or call 801-538-8210.**

**For questions about SAFE,  
call the SAFE Help Desk at 801-538-4141.**

## WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, AND WHY THE ROLE OF THE RESOURCE FAMILY IN THE DCFS TEAM

*By Joelle Horel and LeRoy Franke*

As DCFS moves ahead to implement our new model of practice, it is important to include foster and adoptive (resource) families in this process. However, as we endeavor to find where resource families fit into our model, we have begun to realize that the definition of Utah's resource families is not yet complete.

In bringing the cluster concept to Utah, Ken Patterson wrote:

Complex communication and value's triangles between the placing workers and the training and licensing workers often exist for foster parents. It is in this context that foster parents often feel pulled between rules, regulations, instruction and their own sense of how to best serve a child. Some foster care givers have short lived service to children after becoming licensed, not because of the exhaustion of the care giving, but from the fatigue of managing (and being managed) in multiple relationships. The natural and spontaneous instincts of care giving are dulled by the complexity of the system. Today's foster caregiver sits somewhere between being a client, a volunteer and a contractor, but fits neatly into no single description. (*Supporting Foster/Adoptive/Kinship Families Through Neighborhood Clusters*, July, 2000)

Who are resource families? What is their role? When and where is it appropriate to involve a resource family? Why is it important to include them? These are areas we need to explore not just among staff, but most importantly with resource families themselves.

### Who are Utah's Resource Families?

The unified family assessment (homestudy) allows us to recruit, train and evaluate our resource families through one united effort, be they **shelter parents, foster parents, kin, foster parents seeking to adopt, or adoptive parents**.

The development of neighborhood clusters includes all of the above families into a unified support system. Consistent with the national trend, Utah's Foster Family Association will soon be asking their members to consider including adoptive and kinship families in their organization.

The Foster Care Foundation is now providing initial consultations to assure that prospective resource families understand from the beginning that they are signing-on to be a resource, to be part of a larger team, to support children **and** their families. Initial consultations are also used to refer to other agencies those families who are only seeking to add a "perfect" infant or toddler to their family.

To help recruit and prepare families, DCFS staff needs to encourage all prospective families willing to assist in serving children. The Foundation's initial consultation process helps re-direct those who have unrealistic expectations as to what it means to adopt or foster through the State. (Those families will be referred to private adoption agencies or volunteer programs.)

DCFS needs families wishing only to shelter. We need those wishing only to foster. We need those willing to foster-to-adopt. And finally, we need those wishing only to adopt children who are legally free, who may have siblings in need of placement together, who are school age or teens, and those who have significant special needs. Does this broad definition of a resource family fit into our federal ASFA mandate to provide concurrent planning? Yes! Preliminary research is indicating that states who offer resource family choices are most successful.

Historically, families other than their foster parents or relatives adopt 40% - 45% of the children adopted from state custody. DCFS needs 600 to 800 families over the next four years who are willing to adopt!

Likewise 86% of the children coming into custody will return home within 3-9 months. We need hundreds of families wishing to provide short term foster care!

It is true we do need a large, strong group of adoptive-foster families, but many of families become just that after being in the system awhile as a foster-only or adopt-only family. We need to help develop this type of resource family.

We have great resources to help us recruit, screen, train, assess and support all types of resource families. While we currently have different practices across regions, please, no DCFS Office should be discouraging any of the above groups of prospective parents from applying to become resource families.

What is the Role of a Resource Family?

Consider the following statement, and provide your feedback. This statement will also be shared with resource families in their *Foster Roster* Newsletter.

***The Resource Family is an integral part of the service team that serves the child's family.***

The type of service provided by the resource family to the child's family will vary from case-to-case, but resource families are taught the importance of this interaction throughout their preservice classes. How can DCFS ensure that this theory learned in training is applied to day-to-day fostering/adopting so that children stay connected to enduring relationships that provide a family, stability and belonging and a sense of self that connects the children to their past, present and future?

Resource families have already provided some input. An interesting theme evolved at a recent meeting of experienced foster and families. These families shared that they would often like more interaction with the primary family but found that workers discouraged this in an effort to protect the foster family.

A primary responsibility of resource families is to be the "keeper of memories" and serve as a bridge to connect the child's past, present and future. The most effective way to accomplish this task is for the resource family to have a connection with the child's family! That connection can

range from one of phone conversations, sharing letters, all the way to peer parenting and including the primary family as part of the resource family's circle of friends.

#### When and Where to Include Resource Families?

One solution suggested as helpful is holding an initial meeting between the caseworker, the child's parents and the resource parent either before or shortly after placement. At that point, resource families and primary parents can meet to ask each other questions and help dispel myths and preconceived ideas. These meetings can be short and informal and set the stage for future interactions such as service planning meetings where expectations are negotiated among all team members.

Another opportunity to include families involves any time of placement change.

Finally, be sure at every opportunity to include our resource families as full team members in family team meetings, case planning, and other important times of case- decision making.

#### Why?

Inclusion and full-partnership of resource families—like the importance primary family inclusion--allows a more complete picture of a child's life experience. Inclusion also becomes our foremost resource family retention tool. Not only will we see greater satisfaction and longer tenure among resource families, but full inclusion recognizes the contribution families make and makes the job of caseworker much easier.

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